dimsum.savingchinatown.dvds.valentinesdaygifts.more

bambooda

ASIAN-CANADIAN STUFF FOR THE REST OF US
ISSUE ONE :: FREE :: WWW.BAMBOODA.CA

on the cover ***shrimp dumpling***
here ***shrimp wrapped in rice noodle***

bambooda

asian-canadian stuff for the rest of us
issue one ~ spring 2003

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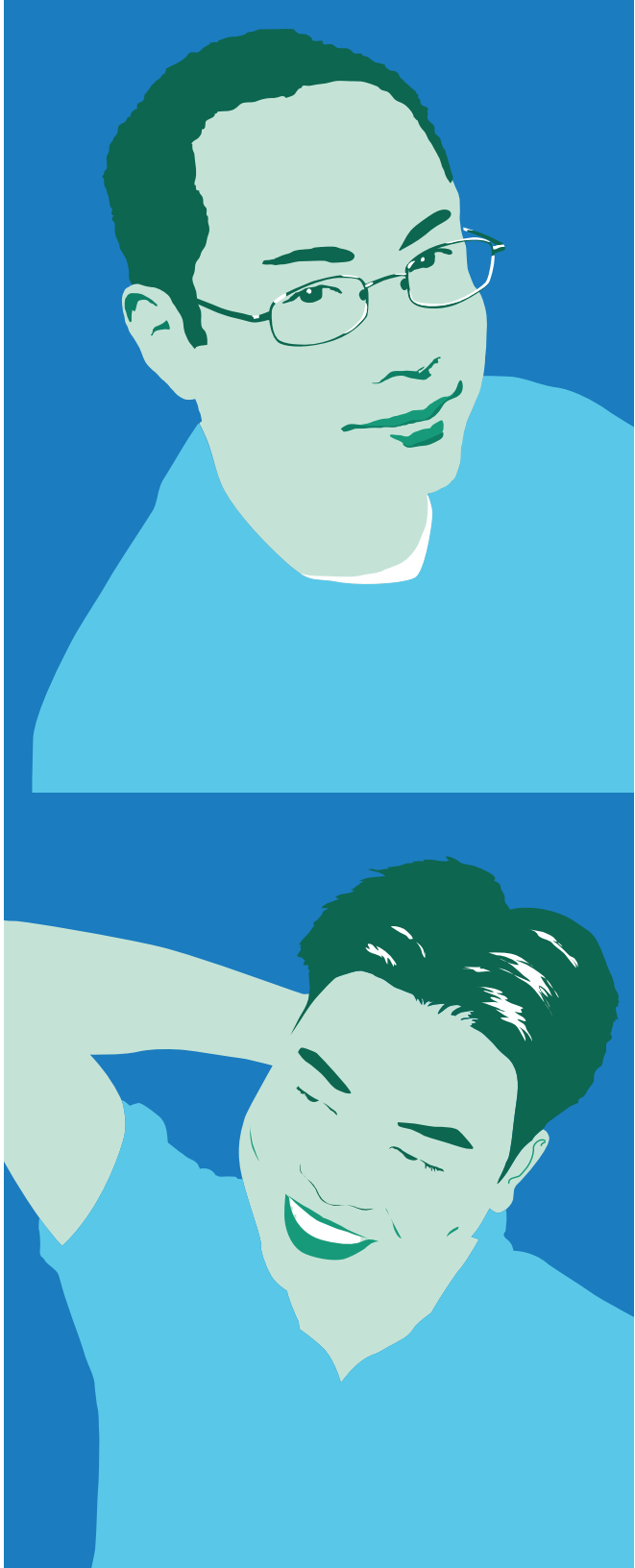
“Hey everyone, it’s Kuan and Dennis!”

bambooda is…
…a crazy, made-up word
…the work of a writer and a designer with too much time on their hands
…a serious look at the unique cultures and communities of Asian-North America
…chock full of juvenile humour
…a fanzine
…a Korean word meaning, “this is the last time I go to a Filipino Thanksgiving”
…building a new Asian North-America
…building absolutely nothing anywhere near anything
…a chance for talented writers, illustrators and photographers to strut their stuff
…an easy way to get a domain name
…a collection of words and pictures
…99.9% fluff
…a phoenix rising from the ashes of rotten fruit
…laced with inside jokes that only our pretentious little clique will understand
…bigger than a breadbox and shallow as a soapdish
…a way for Dennis to pad his portfolio
…the beginning of a beautiful conversation
…a bunch of friends having some serious fun
…none of the above
…all of the above

Welcome to *bambooda*.

Peace and love,
Kuan Foo and Dennis Chui
February, 2003



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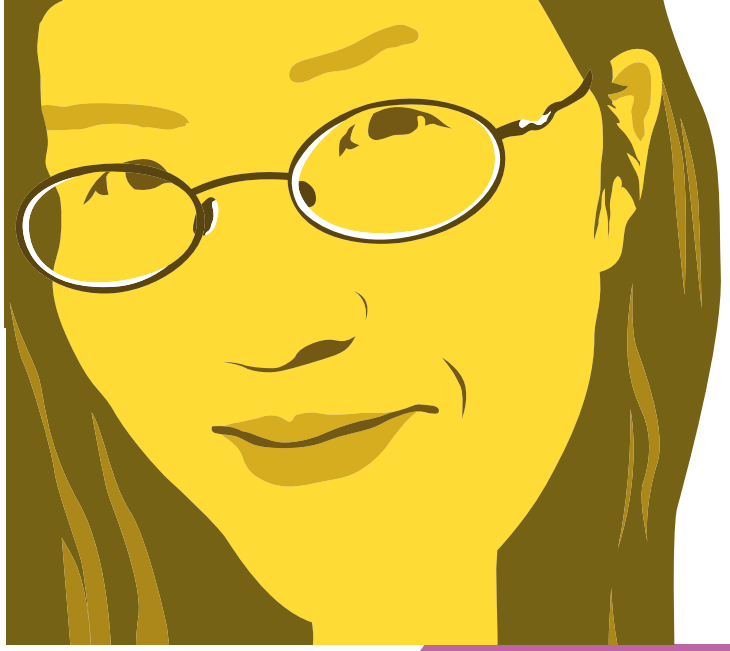

Christine Miguel spends too much money on CDs and DVDs when she should be spending it on clothes and shoes. An entertainment freak from Toronto, she has dabbled in all aspects of show business including music, film, television and radio. A sometimes therapist and a writer for both screen and print she can presently be heard online at WWW.CKLN.FM's FULL MOON on Tuesday nights and in WY Trading in Chinatown bargaining with the guy behind the counter. **Terry Chan** is an IT professional who resides in Toronto so he won't stick out like a sore thumb amid the Big Smoke's pool of poor Asian parallel parkers. He takes one cream and one sugar because he has no trouble digesting dairy products. He wishes he would one day be less geeky and aspires to be a pimping cat with cool hair like Alex, but still reeling in as much dough as Kuan. **Alexander Joo** should have submitted his bio on-time.

Standing Tall

Houston Rockets centre Yao Ming proves he is a big deal.

Prior to the opening tip-off of the game, the battle-hardened giant approached his young opponent and said something quietly into his ear.

No one in Houston's Compaq Center knew the exact words Los Angeles centre Shaquille O'Neal delivered to the Rockets' rookie phenom Yao Ming on January 17 of this year, but from the smile and approving nod of the 7'5" Chinese centre, every one of the 3.3 million fans watching could tell that Shaq's size 22 shoe had managed to stay out of his mouth this time.

In the wake of Shaq's controversial mouthing off last June regarding the Rockets' No. 1 draft pick, the media had fueled the public's interest in the first on-court meeting of the twin titans by drumming up the alleged racism in O'Neal's remarks. What was originally a salutatory remark was twisted around like Vince Carter's knee and mistaken as a mean-spirited jab at Yao's ethnicity. As the NBA's dominant player, the Lakers' centre was merely offering Yao a warm welcome to the fraternity of elite centres in his own unorthodox, if rather ill-advised, manner. It was simply a case of Ebonics meets Mandarin gone awry: what Shaq really meant when he said, "Tell Yao, 'ching chong yang wah ah so'" was "Tell Yao, 'King Kong Yao mah shizzle.'" Or something.

Nothing sells more papers than a verbal volley between two sports stars and in the weeks leading up to the game, hungry journalists had been steadfastly dangling the "is Shaq racist?" question in Yao's face like a US passport. To his credit, Yao has been delightfully open-minded and classy in dismissing O'Neal's comment as a harmless joke, proving to the world that even though Shaq might have an edge on the scale, the young centre from the Shanghai Sharks is the bigger man by far.

However, going up against Shaq on the hardwood is no laughing matter — after all, he carries a monstrous 350 lbs. of heft and that's only his mouth we're talking about — and O'Neal did win the individual match-up that day, scoring 31 points to Yao's 10. Ironically, in this much-anticipated Clash of The Behemoths, it was the little guy who did the lion's share of scoring; Rockets' point guard Stevie Francis stole the show by pouring in 44 points, a career high for the flashy guard, in Houston's overtime victory. But the game did signify one thing: the Shaq vs. Yao rivalry has officially begun.

The next time the two players meet, they'll both be representing the Western Conference at the 2003 NBA All-Star game in Atlanta, Georgia (there is more than a little irony in someone coming all the way from the Far East to play for the West). Even if Yao did edge out the incumbent O'Neal for the starting position by relying more on fan appeal than his track record to date, there is no better way for this ambassador of China and Asian sports pioneer to make a grand entrance to the United States. And if the experts are correct, in time, Yao will emerge as a game-altering player and win his All-Star starting berth fair and square.

Until then, he'll learn from experience such as that gained in that LA-Houston game. Although he only scored a modest 10 points, he managed to hold the fort underneath the net, block five of O'Neal's shots and dunk the winning points in overtime. Yao seems to have taken his coaches advice to heart, sticking to his strengths by using his immense wingspan and broad shooting range, and avoiding his weaknesses by not attempting to overpower O'Neal.

The advice for Shaq when dealing with Yao would be the same: use your strengths and avoid your weaknesses. So, stick to rapping and leave Mandarin to the experts.

– Terry Chan

Saving Chinatown

By Andrew Yan and Martha Nakagawa

At a time when Asian populations in the United States and Canada are at their historic highs, some of the oldest neighbourhoods in North America are in trouble. The Chinatowns of **San Francisco**, **New York** *and* **Vancouver** *are facing major urban problems — some longstanding, others new. What can be done to help these neighbourhoods?*

Saving Chinatown

San Francisco

The Chinatowns of San Francisco, New York and Vancouver have existed for over 100 years, evolving through remarkably similar histories. Before the Second World War, all thrived as sanctuaries from a society that was explicitly hostile towards Chinese migrants, but with the cessation of hostilities, the Chinese could safely begin moving and working outside of Chinatown. During the 1960s, more liberal immigration laws in both the United States and Canada allowed families to be reunited and the move out of Chinatown accelerated. Over time, it has become clear that some Chinatowns in North America have adapted well to these changing demographics, while others have not.

Chinatown San Francisco — Surviving the Boom

San Francisco's Chinatown, the original Gold Mountain, is the oldest and largest on the West Coast. Founded in 1846, the neighbourhood has withstood challenges both natural and man-made including an earthquake that have wiped out the city in 1906 and the schemes of developers, planners, and politicians to gentrify it in the 1960s.

San Francisco's Chinatown has all the characteristics of a classic North American Chinatown. The neighbourhood is nearly 90 percent Chinese American with 15,000 residents living in a 20 square block area. It is the most densely populated and heavily used urban area west of Manhattan. Residents have an average neighbourhood household income of $22,000 US, well below the City average of $55,000. In spite of these challenges, Chinatown has done well for the last 150 years.

However, in the 1990s, San Francisco suddenly became the epicentre of Internet craze. From all accounts, the streets of San Francisco were filled with overpaid geeks from throughout the world and Chinatown was no exception. With this infusion, a

city with an already bad housing market became far worse. At the height of the boom, rents for one-bedroom apartments averaged almost $2000 US a month. With SF's Chinatown located in one of the most desirable neighbourhoods in the City, affordable apartment for families, much less immigrant families, became virtually non-existent.

What was available to low income, new immigrant families could be horrific. A *Los Angeles Times* article described how a family of five (a father, his wife, mother-in-law and two young daughters) lived in a 10-by-10 foot unit in one of Chinatown single-room-occupancy hotels where 60 people share one kitchen and four toilets. The father kept several red plastic bowls for the girls to use in emergencies when the toilets were occupied. This squalor occurs within feet of the glitter of Grant Avenue, Chinatown's main tourist street.

It is no surprise then that the shortage of affordable and liveable housing is the top neighbourhood problem in San Francisco's Chinatown. As a result, the Chinatown Community Development Center (Chinatown CDC), which has been around since the late 70s, has recently taken the lead in providing people with liveable homes acting as developer, landlord and advocate for the residents of San Francisco's Chinatown.

Wai Ching Kwan, Planning Coordinator for Chinatown CDC lists some of the initiatives underway to address Chinatown's housing crisis: "[We have] been outreaching to these families and bringing them together to voice their concerns to the city, offering them referrals to services, and providing them with housing counselling services." Kwan adds that Chinatown CDC also works with the various city departments to ensure any violations of housing, building, safety and health codes are corrected. For the immediate and long term relief to the housing crisis in San Francisco, the Chinatown CDC is also organizing the Asian American community to approve Proposition B, a $250 million city bond for money towards building affordable housing.

San Francisco's Chinatown

Aside from addressing housing issues, Kwan mentions another initiative that has garnered positive media coverage. "The 'Adopt-An-Alleyway' (AAA) youth project [was started] around 10 years ago to get high school youth involved in community volunteerism by cleaning up our alleyways. Since then, the program's expanded to creating a youth-led Chinatown Alleyway Tour and lots of workshops and training for youth development and leadership."

For Kwan, fixing the ills of San Francisco's Chinatown means three things: good publicity through positive media coverage; continuing support to the community, including financial support, volunteer services and customer patronage; and more political support and participation. "More community-minded Asian-Americans need to go into politics," says Kwan. "They need to create policies beneficial to the community, obtain funding and services for the community, speak out on concerns, and raise public awareness to our issues as well just being active within the community to help advocate on behalf of their behalf."

Chinatown New York — in the Shadow of Terrorism

Until a year and a half ago, New York's Chinatown was a growing, bustling community. Robert Weber, director of policy for Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE), notes that Chinatown in the past 10 to 15 years had expanded and was even spilling into Little Italy. But all this changed after September 11, 2001.

Chinatown is situated less than a mile from what was once the World Trade Center. Earlier this year, AAFE, along with 21 other community and academic organizations, released a study titled, *Chinatown After September 11th: An Economic Impact Study*. They found that that nearly three out of four workers in Chinatown's garment and restaurant industries were out of work in the two weeks following 9/11. Three months after 9/11, an estimated 7,700 workers or almost one quarter of Chinatown's labour force remained unemployed. Those who

Until 9/11, New York's Chinatown was a growing, bustling community

New York City

were employed saw a sharp decline in income. Garment workers witnessed a 46 percent decrease in their average weekly wages; restaurant workers, a 61 percent decline; and jewellery store workers, an 80 percent decline.

Five months after 9/11, 40 garment factories had closed their doors permanently, while 70 percent of garment workers and one third of restaurant workers were still working reduced hours. Prolonged road closings, traffic restrictions, telephone and power outages, and increased security measures accelerated added to the woes of local industries including retail and tourism. For example, Chinatown's jewellery district, one of the largest in the city, saw a drop of more than 50 percent. And while general recovery funds and programs such as Small Business Association loans were established, the study found that most of the assistance was short-term and some had eligibility rules requiring businesses to be located south of Canal Street.

With the recent closure of manufacturing industries in Chinatown, there has been pressure to convert these vacant buildings into luxury condominiums and co-ops. Weber notes, "Real estate in the surrounding area is so competitive that a one bedroom unit can command between $400,000 – $500,000." But he states that the very survival of Chinatown hinges on the continuation of such industries as the garment and restaurant business because these are some of the few places of employment that a recent immigrant can sustain themselves economically with limited English skills.

To prevent Chinatown from shrinking or disappearing all together, AAFE with the national support of organizations such as the Freddie Mac, the Enterprise Foundation and the Harvard Joint Center for Housing, along with a broad group of community organizations launched the Rebuild Chinatown Initiative on July 8. Headed by Weber, the initiative has the support of elected officials, including U.S. Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez and New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

"I think the issue of preserving Chinatown goes beyond the borders of New York City's Chinatown," says Weber. "This is one of the few Chinatowns in the country that a Chinese American can work in, live in and return to because it is much, much more than a tourist attraction. And now that it's threatened, the preservation efforts have brought on citywide, statewide and national support. In fact, the national support for the initiative shows how important this community is."

"We will seek a broad section of input from civic leaders, community and fraternal organizations, residents, business owners, and cultural and arts institutions," adds Christopher Kui, AAFE executive director. "The impact of the tragic events of September 11th on Chinatown was profound and far reaching. With the support of important national partners joining us, we can complete

an intensive review of our community and provide a blueprint for rebuilding Chinatown today, one that will help lead the community into the future."

Chinatown Vancouver — Fighting the Future

Vancouver's Chinatown does not have the acute housing crisis of San Francisco or face the problems of a post September 11th New York. Instead, the challenge is far more complicated and difficult to solve. It is also a concern facing every Chinatown in North America: the fundamental demographic, economic and social change in the Chinese community.

In the past, the problems of Vancouver's Chinatown have been traditionally caused by concerns about parking, public safety and cleanliness. There is very little doubt that each of these has had very real effects upon the business climate of Chinatown and over the years, there have been efforts to address these issues. From 1972 to 1986, the City spent $10.2 million on the Chinatown Street Beautification Project. More recently, the City has placed more police officers on the streets of Chinatown and the Downtown Eastside and the Chinatown Business Improvement Association have hired extra security guards to patrol Chinatown. On a community level, the Chinatown Merchants' Association has started a series of service improvement initiatives. In working with the City's Engineering Department, the Chinatown Revitalization Committee has attempted to clean up the alleys of Chinatown. As for parking, the CMA, the province, and the City built a $22 million, 1,000-car parkade in 1995.

In the face of these projects, the question becomes not one of why nothing being done to save Chinatown,

Vancouver's Chinatown

Vancouver

but why the initiatives being implemented are failing to stop the decline? The persistent decline of Chinatown throughout the 90s suggests that the neighbourhood is facing greater challenges than what has been previously identified. To address the economic problems of Chinatown, one needs to go beyond these superficial issues as the forces that are changing Chinatown go beyond its traditional boundaries and into the changing Chinese community of Greater Vancouver.

Over the last 10 years, Vancouver's Chinese community has seen tremendous growth and change. Between 1986 to 1996, the Chinese Canadian population in the City of Vancouver has nearly doubled from 70,455 to 143,115. Much of this growth can be directly attributed to immigration from Hong Kong and, to lesser degree, from Mainland China as well as of ethnic Chinese immigrants from Vietnam. Beyond the numbers, federal immigration polices have produced a Chinese immigrant that can frequently be described as affluent or at least 'comfortable,' skilled, and educated. For example, in 1991, 28 percent of all adult immigrants from Hong Kong held a university degree, compared with the 14 percent of all immigrants and 11 percent of the Canadian-born adult population. In addition to being better educated, the socio-economic status of Hong Kong immigrants is much higher than previous periods of Chinese immigration, as 23 percent of all Hong Kong immigrants between 1988 and 1997 come as business class immigrants which require minimum capital holdings of at least $250,000. From these demographic and class characteristics of Chinese immigrants, they have clearly broken away from the traditional customer base of Chinatown as well as the traditional residential patterns of the Chinese in Vancouver.

From the 50s to the mid-80s, most Chinese-Canadians in Vancouver lived within a seven-kilometre distance from Chinatown with the largest concentration in Vancouver's Eastside. With the influx of wealthier immigrants and investment from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China and the growing social mobility of Chinese Canadians, much of the community has dispersed to other parts of the city. Currently, most Chinese in Vancouver live outside of Chinatown. The neighbourhoods around Chinatown that were once the single centre for the Chinese community in Vancouver in the 60s and 70s have now become one of many Chinese residential centres in Greater Vancouver.

While the pattern of Chinese-Canadians moving out of the neighbourhoods of Chinatown has been occurring since the end of the Second World War, the most important difference in the 90s has been the rise of direct competition to Chinatown for Chinese goods and services. The growth of Chinese supermarkets and Asian malls in Richmond and Coquitlam, and the development of Chinese commercial clusters along main routes such as

Hastings Street, Victoria Drive, Granville Street and Main Street have eliminated the need to go to Chinatown. In the past, the provision of Chinese goods and services has been an important keystone for the Chinatown economy. The dominance of the Chinese consumer market that Chinatown once enjoyed for almost 90 years has evaporated in the span of 10 years. Indeed, the ultimate sign of the times is that you can go to any large supermarket chain in Vancouver to get bok choy or oyster sauce rather than going to Chinatown.

Put together, these external trends and internal challenges have taken a toll upon Chinatown. In a ten-year study of ground floor land uses, vacancies have almost doubled. Certain types of bellwether businesses such as restaurants have slowly decreased from a high of 35 restaurants in Chinatown in 1980 to 28 in 2000. Development permits in the area have decreased from 18 in 1995 to two in 1997 and building permits have diminished from 55 in 1995 to 18 in 1997. Anecdotal data from the Chinatown Merchants' Association (CMA) suggest that certain businesses have lost over 50 percent of their clientele in the past decade. Vancouver's Chinatown is in trouble and this does not bode well for its counterparts across the continent.

The Future of Chinatown?

It is difficult to tell what the future may hold for the Chinatowns of San Francisco, New York, and Vancouver. Whether it is invading hordes of dot-commers, the aftermath of America's worst terrorist attack or simple demographic change, each Chinatown faces its own demons. Chinatowns have stood for over 100 years, but, for them to survive for another 100, they will need individuals, Asian-Canadians and Asian-Americans in particular, to step up. Ultimately, while the nature of each problem may be different, the basic ingredient needed to save the Chinatown is simple: groups of dedicated men and women who are willing to make a difference and make their Chinatown a better place to live and work. ■

Portions of this article appeared in the July 19 – Aug 1, 2002 issue of the Pacific Citizen, the National Publication of the Japanese American Citizens League. *Thanks to Andrew Yan for doing the photos.*

Vancouver, A Plan for Revitalisation

In 2000, the City of Vancouver started a series of Chinatown revitalisation projects governed by a 23-member committee with representatives from such organisations as the Chinatown Merchants' Association, the Chinese Benevolent Association and the Chinese Cultural Centre. The process contains a myriad of initiatives that range from increased social housing to youth programming to strategic partnerships with tourist organisations. The common aim is to make Vancouver, Chinatown a viable destination for tourists, businesses and youth. One project called "The Silk Road" has the city creating a pedestrian path linking the central branch of the Vancouver Public Library to Chinatown. The main Vancouver library is built in a style resembling the Coliseum in Rome, Italy, hence the name, Silk Road referring to the ancient trade route linking Europe and Asia. The project will include maps, commemorative signs, banners, distinctive lampposts and sidewalk markings along the path. Other initiatives include the building of a traditional Chinese ceremonial gate in Chinatown as well as the creation of affordable housing projects along the west side of Chinatown. With implementation occurring over the course of 2002, the effect of these revitalisation projects remains to be seen.

In the lexicon of Asian-American literary lights, William F. Wu is a virtual unknown — yet his work may have reached more Americans in the pre-Joy Luck days than all of the other writers combined. So, why have you never heard of him? Because Wu is what is nowadays politely called an "author of works of speculative fiction." Translation: he's a science fiction writer.

Good sci-fi has as much to tell us about the human condition as the so-called great novels. The novels and stories of James Morrow regularly explore the nature of religion and its perversions. Joe Haldeman's The Forever War is as much about the insanity of Vietnam as it is about interstellar battles. William F. Wu writes of the Chinese-American experience. However, because all of these ideas are cleverly disguised as ripping adventure yarns, they fly below the radar of literary acceptance. You've probably seen Wu's work without even realizing it: think back (way back) to the 1980s and the newly revived Twilight Zone series. Recall that episode with all the Chinese people in it? "Wong's Lost and Found Emporium," adapted from Wu's short story of the same name, was one of the more whimsical and inventive of the post-Serling Zones and has probably brought Wu more recognition than anything else he has written. However, if you want a real taste of what Wu is all about, try and track down his alternative histories of the Chinese odyssey in America, either in the "Jack Hong" stories that he published regularly in Pulphouse magazine or in his hilarious 1989 cyberwestern Hong on the Range. Remember, there's more than one way to tell a story. - Kuan Foo

For more info, check out www.williamfwu.com.

William F. Wu Space Cowboy

asianspotting

For that extra, extra, extra special someone

With Valentine's Day just around the corner, we asked **Alexander Joo** *and* **Christine Miguel** *to each provide us with a list of ideas for gifts for that special someone. We told them that money was no object. Apparently, that was a mistake…*

Alex's List

1. Aloisson Cellular Phone
£28,000 ($68,000 CDN)
www.aloisson.com

Touted as the most expensive cellular phone in the world and with good reason: the Peter Aloisson Diamante features a Motorola v3690 phone with an 18 carat gold casing and garnished with 1200 fully cut diamonds. For 10K more, it'll come with Britney Spears' phone number. 20K, and you can even have mine, big boy.

2. Classic Donkey Kong Arcade Machine
$995 – $1,295 US ($1,600 – 2,000 CDN)
www.arcadeclassics.com

Give your 200-buttoned XBOX the ol' heave ho and pick up this old school classic arcade machine, decorated simply with one joystick and two big fat ol' buttons. When you get bored of Donkey Kong, toss the whole thing away since the games aren't changeable. In other words, don't get bored of Donkey Kong.

GeekyFact: Donkey Kong was the first game designed by Shigeru Miyamoto (who later designed Star Fox, Mario Brothers and Zelda among others). It was originally planned to be a Popeye game, but after licensing fell through, Miyamoto was forced to design his own characters. A Japanese-English dictionary suggested "donkey" as a synonym for "stubborn" and the rest is history.

VLADI PRIVATE ISLANDS GMBH

PETER ALOISSON

ABOVE JAMES ISLAND, BRITISH COLUMBIA Can be yours for the paltry sum of $77,000,000 CDN. Grow-op not included. LEFT ALOISSON CELLULAR PHONE 18 carat gold casing, studded with diamonds. Yours for $68,000 CDN. Get one for the wife while you're at it.

3. Kopi Luwak Coffee
$75 US ($120 CDN)/quarter pound
`good luck finding it`

You see, there're these marsupials called luwaks living in Indonesia that eat coffee beans. Once they excrete them, fully intact, the beans are only then collected to be roasted and ground into coffee. It's probably only $10 for the beans and $65 for the layer of exotic monkey shit, but it'll get you your 15 minutes of fame — unless you live in Edmonton; that friggin' Mall is such a damn spotlight whore.

4. Moller M400 Skycar
£324,000 ($780,000 CDN)
`www.moller.com`

The next time a seagull paints your shoulder white and flaps away, go after it in this killer flying car that's been every boy's fantasy since the automobile's inception. Take to the air at frightening speeds of up to 380mph, and land squarely on your neighbour's cat with its vertical take off and landing (VTOL) capabilities. And with an incredibly low fuel consumption rate of 10L/100km, it's just as energy-efficient as the family Camry.

5. James Island, British Columbia
$49,000,000 US ($77m CDN)
`www.vladi-private-islands.de`

780 acres of coastal island, 2.4km from Vancouver. For spending your hard-earned Sir John A. Macdonald's, they'll even

throw in a golf course and a few cottages, absolutely free! Start up your own army and slowly takeover the 604 — those slow and lazy...er, I mean laid back west coasters are easier to conquer than France.

6. Atlantis Bridge Suite, The Atlantis Resort, Bahamas
$25,000 US ($40,000 CDN)/night
www.atlantis.com

Sell that Bimmer and make a reservation for the priciest hotel suite in the world, located on Paradise Island, Bahamas. You'll get 10 rooms plus your own personal butler and chef to boss around, along with a bar lounge, grand piano, entertainment centres, and more. Unfortunately even for this price, the bed isn't made of cocaine nor is the couch made from breasts.

7. Solotrek XFV Exoskeleton Flying Vehicle
£65,000 ($160,000 CDN)
www.solotrek.com

A personal helicopter-like contraption that'll fly up to 69 knots, which really doesn't mean shit to anyone but sailors. The flight display information appears within the helmet just like in X-Men comics, and with VTOL technology and a small footprint, you can land in virtually any space, not just limited to Kristin Kreuk's backyard. Jessica Alba's too!

8. Wurlitzer 1015 One More Time CD Jukebox
$5,995 US ($9,379 CDN)
www.wurlitzer-jukebox.com

Based on the original 1015 model built in 1946, this bad mamma jamma'll hold 100 CDs and is fully equipped with a three-way stereo sound system, six speakers, rotating colour columns, visible CD-changing mechanism, 60 program pages, and a powerful enough amp for you to shake your moneymaker all night long. Throw in Ace Of Base and the 1015 will even douse itself with gasoline and light on fire, right after kicking your europop ass!

TREK AEROSPACE

ABOVE SOLOTREK XFV EXOSKELETON FLYING VEHICLE Now everyone can be like Professor Frink. RIGHT WURLITZER ONE MORE TIME CD JUKEBOX It'll look slammin' when you play your ghetto-tech CDs on it.

WURLITZER

9. Victoria's Secret 2002 Fantasy Bra And Panty
$10,000,000 US ($15,644,000 CDN)
www.victoriassecret.com

Made by Mouawad (www.mouawad.com), the most luxurious bra in the world comes embellished with 1,150 rubies cut into roses and 1,600 emeralds shaped as leaves, but without Tyra Banks. Holding it together is the Mouawad Mondera diamond, an astounding 60 carat rock that needs a bra of its own. The matching panty is adorned with 2,420 rubies, emeralds and diamonds, and weighs in at 168 carats. You'd better leave your undergarments on when trying on these items.

10. My Car Insurance on a 2002 Mitsubishi Montero Sport
$516.46 CDN/mo; $6,198 CDN/yr
www.kanetics.com

The most expensive automobile to insure according to www.insure.com, plus a 24-year old single male driver with two at-fault accidents and several speeding tickets on his record, equals a hefty chunk of change. The Montero's notorious for flipping over on its back more easily than Kobe Tai, and I really, really dislike cyclists.

Christine's List

1. Dr. Robot
www.drrobot.com

Artificial intelligence that looks oddly like that scuba diver you put in your aquarium. Depending on what you want it can cost as anywhere from $1,500 to $3,100 and it won't actually be available to the public till May 2003. That's ok, you can save up. For something that can teach me languages, I can afford to be patient.

2. The Entire Shaw Brothers collection on DVD
www.shawstudios.com

Now that they've started to release titles onto DVD, the classics that I grew up on are starting to make comebacks onto my home screen. I want them all, ALL OF THEM YOU HEAR! When the young'uns start watching these original bad boys they will all be crouching those tigers and hiding them dragons away.

3. Foreplay
www.foreplayprimer.com

Ladies, we can never get enough foreplay. And it has to be good foreplay. Toys, oils and whips — whatever tickles your fancy. But for me it would be a beefy stud who knows what to do with his hands, lips and tongue. Don't be shy!

4. Anything NOT Laced, Sequined, Beaded or Sparkly from the Victoria Secrets Catalogue
www.victoriassecrets.com

Lace chafes and I'm a simple discreet kinda gal.

5. Ford Escape XLT in Dark Shadow Grey Clearcoat Metallic
www.ford.ca

At approximately $23,500 CDN, it's spacious enough to haul my luggage on those long road trips but compact enough to parallel park in downtown Toronto. (Though, I would have shell out an additional $4,000 CDN for an automatic transmission to enhance my New York cabbie driving skills, as well as a sidestep for my small stature.)

6. Vespa ET4 in Platnium Metallic
www.vespausa.com

This sexy Euro scooter would be ideal for anyone with a jam-packed date book rushing from appointment to appointment. Retailing for a cool $3,980 US, the ET4

Ladies, we can never get enough foreplay. And it has to be good foreplay...

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NOKIA

ABOVE MAVERICK EXECUTIVE PERSONAL LIGHTWEIGHT JET Now you can offer free memberships to the Mile-High Club if you've got one of these babys parked in your driveway. RIGHT NOKIA 3650 Loaded with digital camera, it's the ultimate sex machine to all the chicks.

requires a motorcycle license since it reaches speeds of up to 60mph/100kmph. I don't suggest using it during the brutal eastern winters.

7. Maverick Executive Personal Lightweight Jet

www.maverickjets.com

I don't care how much it costs, I just want to travel anytime, to anywhere on the planet.

8. Nokia 3650

www.nokiausa.com

To go with the plane so my friends can get a hold of me to notify me of sales, at say Guess (www.guess.com). And cuz it has wireless Internet as well as a digital and video camera, it's the ultimate HK tourist tool that can fit in your pocket.

9. Lowrise bootcut jean style leather pants

I can't seem to find them anywhere but they would go so well with my kick-ass boots.

10. Stephen Fung, Taye Diggs or Hugh Jackman

Any one of those three with a strategically placed red ribbon. ■

the bambooda guide to dim sum

If you're somewhat dim about dim sum, pointing at items on the cart always works… as a last resort. However, if you don't want to appear unnecessarily Caucasian, let **DENNIS CHUI** *tell you a bit about these tasty little morsels.*

Chili Sauce ***Cantonese prn: laht-jee-u***

Note for extreme novices: this is not actually a dish; it's a condiment. You can't have dim sum without a bit of chili sauce for extra flavour. The regular pasty red stuff that's usually served with the hot mustard in those little "split-in-two" dishes will do ok, but real chili sauce with the seeds in it is better. If you already use it, consider yourself graduated from the ranks of newbie. You'll look really smooth if you touch your fingers and thumbs together to make a circle when you ask for a little dish of the sauce. ***[Editor's note: Dennis' idea of smooth is his own personal opinion and does not necessarily reflect the views of this publication nor, in fact, anyone else.]***

Shrimp Dumpling ***ha-gow***

This is the California roll of the dim sum world: everyone likes this and so should you. Even toddlers love it. Inside the wheat and potato starch wrapping, you'll find minced shrimp, maybe chopped up water chestnut, and some flour all mixed to form a nice hunk. If you're at one of the

chili sauce

shrimp dumpling

better restaurants, you'll find whole shrimp rather than minced shrimp. If you're a rich bastard, you'll find scallops in there too.

Pork Dumpling *siu-my*

If *ha gow* are california rolls, then *siu my* are cucumber rolls. Made with ground pork (and perhaps some bamboo shoots and water chestnuts), these shouldn't scare anybody except vegetarians and pigs. There's usually a little dab of colour on top. Fancier places might use a little bit of fish roe instead of whatever goop they usually use.

Sticky Rice wrapped in Lotus Leaf *naw-my-fahn*

Just like it sounds: a big lump of rice wrapped in a lotus leaf then steamed. Could contain ground pork, bits of chicken, chinese sausage and so on. A lot more glutinous and sticky than regular rice. Another kids' favourite.

Chinese Donut wrapped in Rice Noodle *jah-leong*

Not all restaurants have this one, but it's super-tasty and worth driving the extra few blocks for. It's the same deep-fried Chinese donut that's served with congee ***(jook)***, except that it's wrapped in a thin sheet of rice noodle and served with sweet hoisin sauce. Some places also serve it with a peanutty-buttery sauce too but … that's just plain weird to me (although it does taste ok).

pork dumpling

sticky rice

chinese donut wrapped in rice noodle

Bean Curd Roll ***seen-jook-gyoon***
Meat filling wrapped in bean curd. The layers of bean curd give it a nice texture when you bite into it. The filling is usually made with ground pork, bamboo shoots and maybe Chinese mushrooms or wood ear fungus (tastier than it sounds).

Shrimp Wrapped in Rice Noodle ***ha-cheuuung***
Three shrimp (two if you're a sorry ass) wrapped in soft rice noodle and drizzled with oily, sweet soy sauce on top. Another kids' favourite, this one goes down easy. Popular variations use beef ***(ngow-cheuu-uuung)*** or barbecue pork ***(cha-siu-cheuuuuuuuuuuuuung)***.

Deep-Fried Squid ***jah-seen-yow***
Yippee-ky-yay muthafucka, this is some tasty shit! Salty, deep-fried squid, which can be spicy too depending on the restaurant. My little cousin Connor can eat two plates of this stuff all by himself, and he's only five years old, so what are you waiting for?

Chicken Feet ***foong-jow***
Exactly what it says, chicken feet. Discarded by white folk all across the country, these "scraps" have been gathered up by us Chinese and steamed in a slightly spicy black bean sauce until the knuckles fall apart in your mouth. If you eat these, you are a king of dim sum. But don't make a big deal about it or else

bean curd roll

shrimp wrapped in rice noodle

deep-fried squid

chicken feet

you'll look like a dork — just enjoy the flavour and texture of the claw-pads, and don't be afraid of using your fingers. Save the chicken-finger-nails for me. Flaaaaaavaaah!

Beef Stomach ***ngow-toh***
Known in some quarters as tripe, this dish is the stomach of a cow, sliced up and steamed. It's chewy and delicious. I love the textured flaps, don't you? If you eat these in front of your future in-laws, I swear they will be amazed and bow down to your greatness. You'll be getting blown tonight, believe me! ***[Editor's note: uhm, by your in-laws?!?]***

Steamed Spareribs ***jing-py-gwut***
Fatty pork ribs chopped into little pieces and steamed with black bean sauce. Another yummy dish that takes a lot of love and care to prepare, so appreciate it you goof! (You can also get a variation that is served on rice, called ***py-gwut-fahn***.)

Fried Taro Cake ***jah-woo-tow-goh***
Not available at all restaurants (that's why we don't have a picture of it), but should be tried at least once in your boring, miserable life. Taro is a starchy tuber (root vegetable) that is also used to make Hawaiian poi. In this dish, it's all mashed-up and deep-fried with a wispy, crispy coating. When you bite into it, it's sort of like a Russian piroshki except much thicker and heavier in texture.

beef stomach

steamed spareribs on rice

Another yummy dish that takes a lot of love and care to prepare

Fried Radish Cake ***loh-bak-goh***
Grated and pulverized Chinese radish, mixed with bits of Chinese sausage and stuff, formed into cakes which are then sliced off and pan-fried. Has unique thick mushy texture.

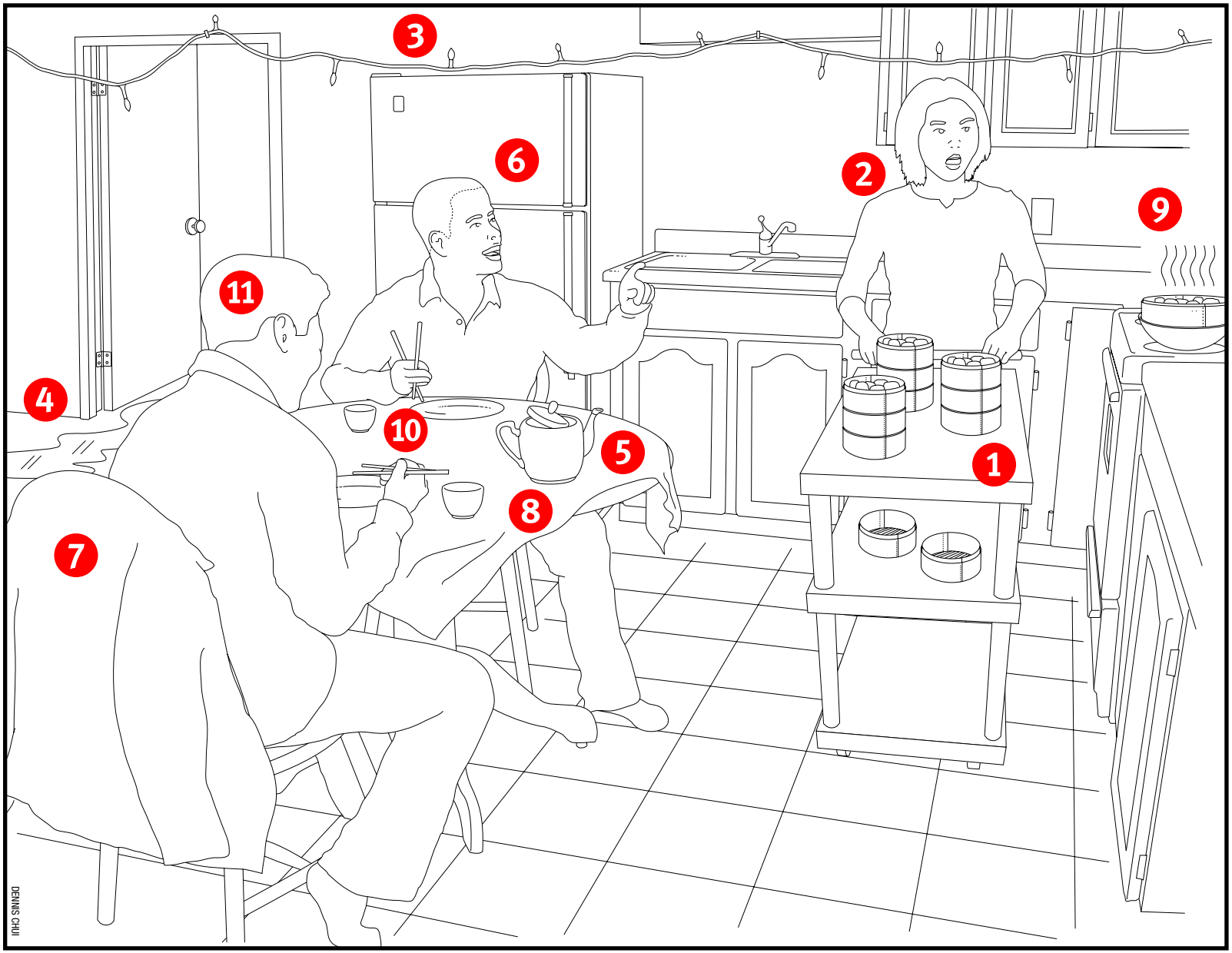
Shrimp and Chive Dumpling ***guw-choy-gow***
A close relative of the *har-gow*, this should also be eaten on sight.

Eggplant ***yeong-ai-gwa***
Slice of Japanese eggplant (ironic isn't it?) with a dollop of fish cake paste stuck on top. Usually pan-fried or shallow-fried. Some restaurants don't have enough eggplant to balance out the fish paste.

So there you have it, a partial cross-section of popular dim summery. Many restaurants nowadays have lunch specials where each dish is only $2 (at least, there are many in Vancouver — who cares about the rest of the country). The quality can vary from restaurant to restaurant, but at least it won't hurt your pocketbook that much. Think of it as trying pot before you get into the harder stuff. When you're ready, you can try places like **Sun Sui Wah** (`www.sunsuiwah.com/ssw_english/e_home.html`) where you can easily spend $15 to $20 per person. And don't forget to bring some home for the people who couldn't make it or else your mom'll nag you about it for ages. ■

Dim sum items photographed on location at ***Szechuan Chonqing*** *restaurant, Vancouver.*

How to recreate the dim sum experience at home



1 Cart from Staples. **2** Have your girlfriend play the dim sum girl who ignores you. **3** Old Christmas decorations. **4** Pee on the bathroom floor. **5** Teapot with plastic nozzle on the spout; leave cover ajar to signal that you want a refill. **6** Token newbie friend asking for a fork. **7** Put your coat on the back of your chair (turn your coat inside-out if you want to play the paranoid Chinese mom). **8** Cut-up garbage bag used as a table cloth. **9** Set up bamboo steamers on your wok. **10** Teacups that get too hot to hold. **11** Develop strategies in your mind for secretly paying the bill. **12** Have too few chairs. **13** Build a little shrine in the corner. **14** Ghetto blaster playing tape of people talking loudly in Cantonese.

Words and illustration by Dennis Chui

asianfOOd

Chicken and Beef Satay a recipe by The Culinary Titan

Chicken Marinade

3/4 c	"Chili Sauce for Chicken" (a Thai sauce available in Asian markets)
1 tbsp	oyster sauce
1/2 tbsp	dark soy sauce
1/2 tbsp	light soy sauce
2 cloves	chopped garlic
16 pc	boneless chicken thighs (thighs are more tender and juicy than breasts)

Beef Marinade

1/2 c	chopped cilantro (discard stems)
2 cloves	chopped garlic
1/2 c	light soy sauce
1/4 c	mushroom soy sauce
1 tbsp	sesame oil
1 lb	top sirloin (can substitute New York steak or tenderloin)

Peanut Satay Sauce

1/2 c	dry roasted peanuts, crushed
1/8 c	light soy sauce
1/2 c	peanut butter
1 tbsp	sesame oil
1/4 c	water

Warm peanut butter in microwave on high for 45 seconds to soften. Combine all ingredients and mix well.

Soak wooden skewers in water for at least 1/2 hour. Cut beef into strips, cutting across the grain. Combine with all **Beef Marinade** ingredients and mix well. Let marinade at room temperature for 1 hour. Cut chicken into strips. Combine with all **Chicken Marinade** ingredients and mix well. Let marinade at room temperature for 45 minutes – 1 hour. Skewer meat. Preheat grill for 15 minutes. Grill beef on high heat for 2 minutes per side. Grill chicken on high heat for 3 – 4 minutes per side. Serve with **Peanut Satay Sauce**. *Serves 4 people*

Food-Safe Tips

- When cooking, use separate tongs for raw and cooked meat.
- If you are using only one cutting board, cut all the vegetables first, before cutting the meat, to prevent cross-contamination.

How to Crush Peanuts

- Bottom of a frying pan on top of a cutting board
- Mortar and pestle
- Hand blender or food processor
- Put peanuts in a plastic bag and bash with a heavy pan

Cut against the grain for maximum tenderness Marination helps tenderize meat and intensify flavors Soak skewers in water before using Grilling gives best flavour, but baking or broiling are acceptable alternatives

the dangerous guide to bootleg dvds

In the DVD retail world, there is a place beyond your typical Future Shop or Virgin Megastore — a sleazy grey-market underbelly where you can buy DVDs for as little as $6 a pop. Welcome to the world of Asian bootlegs… ***by twenty-four hour lobster***

If you're a regular consumer of Asian DVDs, you'll know that compared to North American DVDs, the quality isn't that hot. But Asian *bootleg* DVDs reach an all-new low.

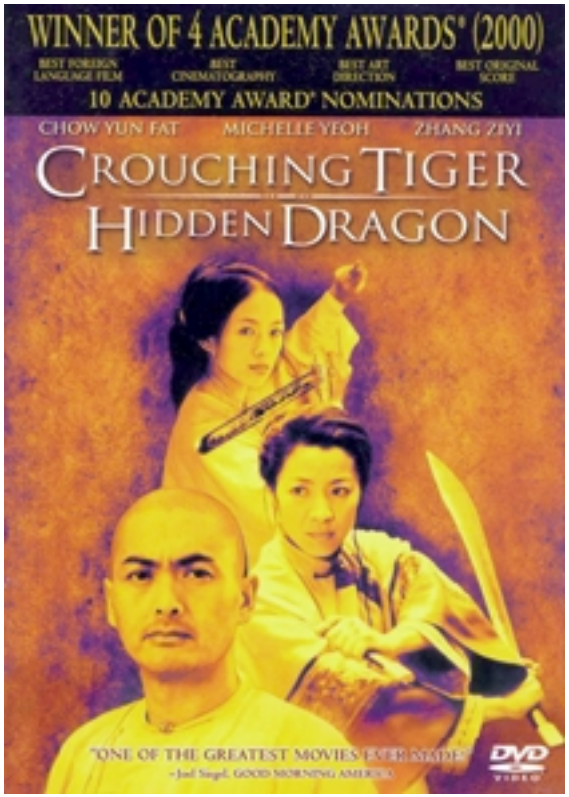
How to spot Bootlegs

We're all used to professionally packaged consumer products so when you come across a bootleg DVD in "that kind of store," you might feel that something's wrong, although you might not be able to pin-point exactly what's different. Let me spell it out for you…

"I'll know it when I see it"

Price. The old adage "if it's too good to be true…" definitely applies here. You'll see deals like "$8 for one, $20 for three (tax included)" — dead giveaways that you're dealing with sleazy products. Genuine releases will cost between $12 – $30 or more.

Shitty cover. Asian companies (even legitimate ones) know fuck-all about nice packaging. Bootleg DVDs will have covers that look like they came out of a colour-photocopier or were badly scanned and



COLUMBIA TRI-STAR

The genuine North American release is the real deal. All the bonus features actually work.

printed out on a colour laser printer. You'll see moiré-patterns and shifted colours all over the place. Text will appear slightly fuzzy instead of sharp, indicating that it has been scanned in and reproduced.

Poor packaging. The cover inserts might be cut sloppily, so they're either undersized or oversized, causing the inserts the buckle or wrinkle inside the outer plastic sleeve on a standard DVD case. If you examine legit mainstream DVDs, you'll see that the packaging and assembly is much cleaner.

Spelling mistakes. This is a continual source of amusement. Titles, actor's names, basically anything can be misspelled on a bootleg DVD. However, strange grammar can occur on any Asian release, bootleg or not. See: *Engrish*.

Nonsensical text. The back of most bootleg DVDs will be a mess of Asian and English text that has nothing to do with the actual movie. The movie will be, say *Kikujiro*, but the credits on the back are from *The Untouchables* and the description is from *Superman*.

Logo abuse. Sure, the cover will say "Dolby Surround," "widescreen," "high quality picture," "Superbit" or "Infinifilm," but this is NOT TRUE. Same with the DVD specs on the back for sound, language and subtitles — they cannot be trusted. And since when was *Audition* a Universal Pictures production?

When you crack it open…

Poor printing on disc. It'll look like a bad screen print with paint chipping off or with colours that are all wrong. Some legitimate Asian releases have printing etched right into the disc surface. Bootleg releases never have discs that duplicate that look.

May or may not play. Bootleg DVDs are the cheapest quality you can get, with absolutely no quality control. Discs can be warped, or will just skip or stall in your DVD player. Some only work in a DVD-ROM drive on your computer.

Menu options that don't work. When bootleggers pirate a disc, they usually only duplicate the movie. The menu will still appear on the screen, but you'll only be able to select certain options. Extras, trailers and other bonuses will be missing or don't work properly.

Missing subtitles. The first question I ask myself whenever I come across an interesting Asian DVD is whether or not it has English subtitles. Sometimes you can't really rely on what it says on the back on the case. You can't even rely on the staff to tell you for sure either. Even though Asian stores make a huge fuss over it, make them play the disc for you so you can check before you buy it. Otherwise, you'll just have to buy it and hope for the best. In one case, I checked the disc in the store only to bring the thing

home to discover that the English subtitles I was seeing were fake! (The subtitles were taken from Shakespearean flick, although the timing of the subtitles was perfectly in sync with the new movie.)

Poor video encoding. Almost always, a bootleg will have poorer video quality than the original legitimate release. The degree of poorness can vary greatly though. I've seen some pretty great-looking discs that made me feel good for not shelling out the big bucks for the real thing, but then I've been burned on discs that are absolute shit.

Wrong aspect ratio. One disc that demonstrates this is the bootleg release of *Spirited Away* that everyone seems to have. The widescreen picture has been stretched vertically and is shown as fullscreen, so that everyone appears tall and thin. There's nothing you can do to correct this problem, apart from watching it on your computer and fixing the aspect ratio manually, which is not fun.

Questionable film source. Again, quality can range from good (when ripped from legitimate DVD releases) to awful. The awful stuff usually comes from "video-camera-in-the-theatre" bootlegs called "cams." Yes, they come complete with shadows of people's heads, missing scenes and sounds of popcorn-munching. The dead giveaway is when you see a DVD for a Hollywood movie that's still in the theatres.

Buyer beware

If you're still willing to dive headlong into the world of bootleg DVDs, even after I told you about all the problems above, take note of the following:

These stores are unfriendly. You may think you're building a rapport with the staff, but Asian stores are not about customers – they're about sales.

The staff knows jack-shit about cinema. It's like if you walk into Future Shop and ask the guy in the blue shirt what he thinks about Collector's Edition of *Touch of Evil*. It's futile. This goes doubly-so for Asian stores.

No returns. Say you're "surprised" when you bring a disc home? Tough luck. You have to practically beg to get them to take something back — even if you want to just swap the movie for another copy that hopefully works.

Expect to get burned. Don't go back to the store, because that won't work. Just swallow it. It'll make you stronger.

So why buy at all?

Unfortunately, bootlegs are often the easiest way to get to see new Asian movies. The majority of Asian movies will never see a proper North American release. In the rare case that a film does come out domestically (like the Korean film *Shiri*), it's 2 – 3 years after it came out in Asia. Is a crazed film fanatic going to wait that long? Hell no. If you knew that the entire Miyazaki back catalogue is available on DVD in a store down the street, would you refuse? I wouldn't and didn't.

This situation is not the best. Not for the industry, not for consumers, not for anybody except for the pirates. So how can we change this? Support the stores in your community and on the Internet that stock legitimate import titles. PokerIndustries.com, yesasia.com and AsianCult.com (publishers of the wicked 'zine, *Asian Cult Cinema*) are examples of retailers which stock legitimate titles and ship to Canada. (Whether or not your nasty Japanese S&M DVD will make it across customs is another story.) MAL is a Canadian chain store that sells Asian CDs and DVDs exclusively, and only stocks legit releases. There are two locations in Vancouver, and probably similar stores in your area if you look hard enough.

It might be more expensive to go legit, but in the long run, you'll have less headaches and a better quality collection. Good films always deserve your money. ■

Twenty-Four Hour Lobster is happily married with a huge DVD collection.

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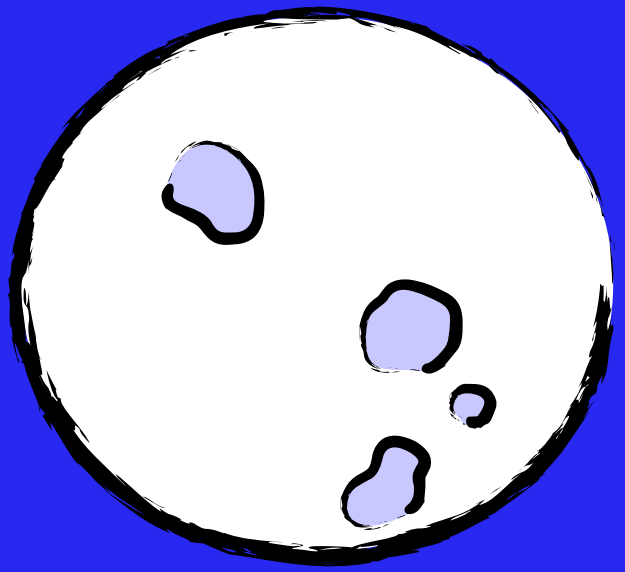

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FULL MOON

picks and pans

reviewers: **Kuan Foo, Alexander Joo, Christine Miguel and Francis "Sanfrandisco" Yee Loy**

*****	**Classic**
****	**Very good**
***	**Good, particularly if you are a fan of the genre, actor, etc**
**	**Rental, if there is nothing better on TV**
*	**Run away**

MOVIES: IN THEATRES

Long Life, Happiness and Prosperity (2002) ***

Starring: Sandra Oh, Russell Yuen, Valerie Tian
Director: Mina Shum
Country: Canada

In 1994, Mina Shum burst upon the Canadian movie scene with her debut feature, *Double Happiness*. Critics lauded Shum's energetic directions and the star-making performance of lead actress Sandra Oh, and audiences responded to the warmth and humour in the script — double happiness, indeed. Unfortunately, Shum's attempt to go darker and edgier in her 1997 follow-up, *Drive, She Said*, failed to garner much response from either group.

Therefore, it is not surprising that Shum's third feature, *Long Life, Happiness and Prosperity*, reprises many of the elements that worked so successfully in her first movie: the evocation of Chinese virtues in the title, setting the action in the Vancouver Chinese-Canadian community, casting Sandra Oh in a lead role. However, structurally and thematically, the films are quite different. Whereas *Double Happiness* focussed on a single story, *LLHP* is an ensemble piece with three interweaving plots. Shuck (Chang Tseng), an elderly security guard, is unable to tell his wife (Tsai Chin) he has been laid off. Bing's (Ric Young) eagerness to impress his estranged father causes him to ignore his own son. Kin (Oh), a harried single mother struggles to make ends meet while raising her precocious daughter Mindy (Tian). Linking the stories is Mindy's attempts to improve her mother's fortunes by dabbling in Taoist magic, which has unforeseen consequences for all the characters. However, despite the outward complexity of the script, this film feels somehow smaller and less ambitious than it should. Part of the problem is that none of the stories is particularly compelling, and at least one of them, the tale of Bing and his family, is almost painfully predictable. The magic realism of Mindy's experiments is a too-convenient device for wrapping up the loose plot strands, and other attempts to inject whimsy into the movie — Kin's accordion playing, a random shot of a clockwork chicken — seem precious and forced.

ODEON FILMS INC

ODEON FILMS INC

ABOVE Mina Shum performs a Jedi mind trick on unsuspecting cast members. BELOW Sandra Oh and Valerie Tian.

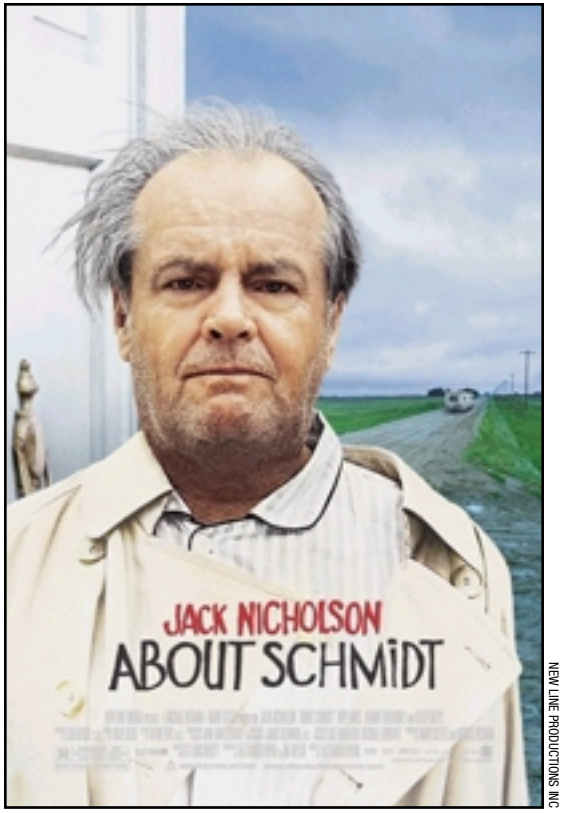
What saves *LLHP* are the lead performances, which are uniformly charming and full of good humour. Chang Tseng and Tsai Chin are veteran performers and are able to project more nuances to their relationship than can be actually expressed in words. Sandra Oh is her usual intelligent and witty self and she has a wonderfully natural rapport with her onscreen daughter. While the actors cannot entirely overcome the weaknesses of the script, they do create a number of memorable moments that go a long way toward making the film seem more substantial than it is.

On a side note, a few critics have faulted the film for lacking the cultural conflict of *Double Happiness*. I disagree. Why should films about Asian-North Americans always be about cultural conflict? In fact, what I find laudable about *LLHP* is that it does not focus on *Joy-Luck*-style cultural conflict or the search for identity but instead depicts Asian-Canadians as a vibrant, functional part of the Canadian community. As such, it represents a step forward in the way that the Asian-Canadian community sees itself and the stories that it tells. - KF

About Schmidt (2002) **1/2

Starring: Jack Nicholson, Kathy Bates, Hope Davis
Director: Alexander Payne
Country: USA

Judging by the acclaim that Jack Nicholson has received for his portrayal of Warren Schmidt, a recent retiree and widower who is forced to confront his wasted life, I may be in the extreme minority in saying that I did not like his performance. Much has been made of how Nicholson submerges his usual devil-may-care, smart-ass tendencies in order to play a man with little spark or drive but why should he receive extra credit simply for playing against type? Not for a moment did I believe that Schmidt was a real person so much as a collection of actorly tics: the rusty little walk, the tilted torso, the hesitant speech patterns, the tightly compressed lips — you can almost see the calculation in Nicholson's eyes as he ACTS. Writer/director Payne attempts to make Schmidt a more appealing character by making the people around him extremely unappealing: his daughter (Davis) is whiney and histrionic, her fiancé is a pony-tailed loser with a lecherous, ageing hippie for a mother (Bates). Unfortunately, this kind of caricaturing only makes the film seem condescending and mean-spirited. "Look," Payne seems to be saying. "Aren't you glad you're not one of them? Aren't you glad you're not a loser?" As far as satire goes, this is about as a subtle as a Quebec separatist on Jean Baptiste Day. - KF



NEW LINE PRODUCTIONS INC

There's something about Schmidt...

Adaptation (2002) ****1/2

Starring: Nicholas Cage, Meryl Streep, Chris Cooper
Director: Spike Jonze
Country: USA

If you really want to see someone submerge himself in a role, watch Chris Cooper as orchid poacher John Laroche in *Adaptation*. At no point does Cooper appear to be anything other than the kind of autodidactic, amoral sleazeball whom you might see frequenting some of seedier areas of town. Ironically, this deeply naturalistic performance comes in the middle of the most offbeat Hollywood film of last year. The movie follows the travails of writer Charlie Kaufman (Cage) as he attempts to adapt *The Orchid Thief*, a non-fiction account of Laroche's exploits by *New Yorker* writer Susan Orlean (Streep), into a screenplay. On the way, he is continually derailed by his own insecurities, the uncertain nature of truth and beauty, and the conventions of Hollywood movies, all of which threaten to overturn both the movie he is writing and the one we are watching. Kaufman, Orlean and Laroche are all real people and the movie came about when Kaufman attempted to adapt Orlean's meditative and largely plotless book but, finding the task impossible, instead wrote a screenplay about his difficulty in adapting the book. Narcissistic and self-absorbed to be sure but also very funny and original and one of the few movies in the multiplexes that actually expects you have some intelligence. – KF

Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets (2002) ***

Starring: Daniel Radcliffe, Emma Watson, Rupert Grint
Director: Chris Columbus
Country: USA

From the standpoint of filmmaking technique, *Chamber of Secrets* is technically superior to its predecessor, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, however it seems to lack a bit of the previous film's energy and charm. The child actors have all aged and it suits some better than others. Daniel Radcliffe as Harry has developed a kind of mature intensity and seriousness, however Rupert Grint as sidekick Ron Weasley has an unfortunate tendency to mug his way through scenes, which may have been cute when he was younger but isn't anymore. (He is not aided by puberty; his voice spends most of the movie cracking between tenor and baritone). Adding some nice depth and background texture are the supporting players mostly made up of reliable British thespians such as Maggie Smith, Alan Rickman, Kenneth Branagh and the late Richard Harris (although, Dobby the House Elf ranks at least a six on the Jar-Jar Binks

COLUMBIA PICTURES

COLUMBIA PICTURES

WARNER BROS

TOP Nicolas Cage and Nicolas Cage. MIDDLE bambooda fave Chris Cooper. BOTTOM Where can I get a scarf like those?

Annoying CG Creatures Scale). Once again, director Columbus has remained slavishly faithful to the book and die-hard fans will have little to complain of. Others may find the proceedings a bit slow and plot-heavy. - KF

DVDS: NEW

Gen-Y Cops (2000) **1/2

Starring: Stephen Fung, Sam Lee, Maggie Q, Edison Chen
Director: Benny Chan
Country: Hong Kong

Leave it to the US to produce a killing machine that is invulnerable to any bullet, blowtorch or babe. Leave it to the US to steal it from a high-tech Asian punk who's crazy enough to steal it back from the FBI. Leave it the US to feel that they are so superior to anyone else on the planet that they start pointing fingers and blaming everyone else but themselves when they're on foreign turf. No, this is not the latest foreign policy statement from George W., but rather the plot to *Gen-Y Cops*, the action-packed but incoherent sequel to 1999's *Gen-X Cops*.

You would think anything with Stephen Fung in it ought to be a good time but this technological thriller overdoes everything (except in the romance, which is non-existent – a bit of a let down considering the obvious pairing of Edison Chen and Maggie Q). Canuck ex-pat Christy Chung prances around as Inspector Chung who's more cheerleader than officer and Sam Lee, along with Fung, the only holdover from the first film, overacts shamelessly as Alien.

But that's not the reason why we watch these films, after all; it's all about Stephen Fung and his sexy everything. Also, for the attention-span-challenged, there are some impressive martial arts sequences with a lot of shit blowing up, gunplay, including mock fireplay with paint balls, and CG effects, both good and bad. All in all, it's an okay action film but the disjointed plot leaves me asking one question: did Universal take an editing axe to it like US Studios are known to do with foreign films?

Unfortunately, if you don't absolutely love the movie, there is no reason to buy the DVD. To put it bluntly, the presentation sucks. The picture is in full frame only, the sound quality is about as loud and clear as my sinus during allergy season and the extras are completely non-existent. I can't believe I got suckered into buying it. I'm so ashamed. – CM

MEDIA ASIA / UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOME VIDEO

The Tuxedo (2002) *

Starring: Jackie Chan, Jennifer Love Hewitt
Director: Kevin Donovan
Country: USA

Cab driver Jimmy Tong (Jackie Chan) has just landed a new gig as chauffeur to super-spy Clark Devlin (Jason Isaacs) when a skateboard-bomb that plunges his new boss into coma and Jackie into a shitty movie. Paltry laughs ensue as Jackie dons Devlin's tuxedo, modified with more gadgetry than your cousin's Civic, and experiments with its extraordinary functions. Enter Jennifer Love Hewitt as Del Blaine, a CIA-type scientist whose breasts surprisingly couldn't even save this movie. And have you seen those things? They're incredible.

Sadly, the entertaining Jackie Chan scenes you'd expect are scarce, as a clumsily delivered plotline involving the evil monopoly of the world's bottled water industry runs interference. Jackie Chan flicks are fun when he gets hurt; he did not get hurt in this movie. Jennifer Love Hewitt flicks are fun when she wears a tank top; she did not wear a tank top in this movie. It's like walking into a monkey whorehouse without a bag of bananas: a waste of what could've been a potentially thrilling adventure.

The dialogue was unforgivably asinine; even this lowly magazine writer could've written something less tacky. Not that the actors help much. Hewitt whines throughout the entire film with a high-pitched squawk more annoying than that of a Korean girlfriend. Another verbally challenged individual, The Godfather of Soul, James Brown, makes a cameo appearance but makes his exit before showing off those flying feet of his. Add to that Isaacs' British accent, which I hate on principle, and Chan's fractured English actually starts to sound pretty good. But the biggest mistake this movie makes is to concentrate on special effects rather than Chan's own superb natural ability to kick ass and take names. This movie didn't need his specific talents, which likely means he shouldn't have made it.

As a lover of formulaic Hollywood flicks, I walked into the theatre with the expectation of being mildly entertained with flashy kicks and even flashier cleavage. But *The Tuxedo* failed to live up to even these low expectations — trying to adjust my crotch without people noticing proved more diverting. If you still insist on watching this flick, Colin Mochrie, of *Whose Line Is It Anyway* fame, will at the very least entertain you for the five short minutes he's onscreen. If you absolutely must see this, I suggest you rent it — and that you'll need that fast-forward button. – AJ

ENTERTAINING AND FUN? We think not... The DVD comes out February 25, so you know when to run (away).

DVDS: OLD BUT GOOD

Jiang Hu - The Triad Zone (2000) ****

Starring: Tony Leung Ka-Fai, Sandra Ng Kwan-Yue
Director: Dante Lam
Country: Hong Kong

CHINA STAR / ICON PICTURES

Jim Yam is going through a mid-life crisis. He is an aging man in a young man's profession. His contemporaries are dying off or retiring. He is surrounded by ambitious youths and technological advances that undermine his position and may fundamentally change the way he does business. He can't help but feel old, stupid and even slightly ridiculous. In most middle-aged men, this might result in wearing flashy clothes, driving around in expensive cars and having passionate flings with embarrassingly young women in some misguided attempt at rejuvenation. The problem is that Jim already does all of these things; he's the head honcho in Hong Kong triad and strutting around exuding adolescent machismo is simply part of the job description

Dante Lam's *Jiang Hu - The Triad Zone* is a satire both on gangster films and growing old that elicits plenty of belly laughs in spite of its overall melancholy tone. The opening scene finds Jim Yam in a classic mano a mano confrontation with a younger gangster in a restaurant. In a scene played primarily for laughs, the younger man chides Jim for being behind the times and not knowing about the Internet or IPOs. Jim responds in the only manner he knows: by beating up the young man. The old ways have triumphed for the time being and Jim celebrates by dancing gracefully across the tabletops. However, Jim's victory is short lived; someone has taken out a contract on his life. This is hardly news to a gangster and indeed Jim's fellow triad leaders, loyal underlings and even his jaded wife Sophie treat this latest threat as part of the everyday cost of doing business in the underworld. But caught in throes of his barely definable angst, Jim can't help but take it more personally than usual. Realizing that even those who are closest to him may be responsible for the contract, he embarks on a mission of self-discovery, taking a long hard look at the people surrounding him and uncovering many unusual facets in the loves and loyalties that he had previously taken for granted. He starts to wish for the simpler days when he and Sophie were petty thieves on the streets of London. But is this introspection coming in time? Will this nostalgia prove fatal? Or is he, in fact, already dead, the greed and self-destructiveness of the criminal underworld having sucked the life out of him?

Director Dante Lam is a relative newcomer to the Hong Kong scene but the movie has all the energy and visual flair that we have come to expect in Hong Kong gangster movies: slow

motion action sequences, oddly canted camera angles, dramatic zooms and dynamic jump cuts. What places this film a notch above most of its genre is the richness of the plot and characters. Jim and his fellow gangsters are far from the cool killing machines of John Woo's morally simplistic bullet ballets. Their strength is deceptive and often illusory and their all too obvious mortality is both touching and banal. The battles that they wage are fought as much against the fears of insignificance and encroaching age as they are with each other.

The script emphasizes both the gritty reality and the inherent absurdity of the gangster lifestyle as it continually shifts in tone between brutal violence, outrageous slapstick and tender romance, sometimes even within the same scene. A bloody shoot-out is punctuated by a startling and oddly moving admission from Jim's bodyguard. A tension-filled meeting between the triad bosses to determine the identity of Jim's would-be assassin is upstaged by a gossip session on traditional remedies for cancer. While some of these shifts are jarring, none are gratuitous and, unlike some American satires where humour and irony are used to mock and create an emotional distance from the characters, the humour here actually reinforces the humanity of the characters and makes the serious scenes more poignant.

Anchoring the movie is a solid performance by Tony Leung Ka-Fai (last seen on these shores as the male lead in *The Lover*) who plays Jim as a man all too aware of his own obsolescence in a changing world and yet not fully equipped with the intellectual and emotional tools he needs to deal with it. In one comical scene he is explaining the different punishments he inflicts depending on whether his intended victim is a man or a woman when he is suddenly asked how he would deal with a transvestite. The look of confusion on Leung's face as he grapples with this new concept while still trying to maintain his gangster cool is priceless. Conversely, Leung is equally good in portraying the drama in Jim's conflicting emotions when he is confronted with an old henchman's unwavering loyalty, a loyalty that even Jim is starting to believe is misplaced. Also strong is Sandra Ng Kwan-Yue as Sophie who starts off as the stereotypical "kitten with a whip" triad wife but quickly evolves into something far deeper and sadder. The supporting cast is effective and spiced up with a few cameos from well-known Hong Kong character actors like Anthony Wong Chau-Sang and Eric Tsang Chi-Wai.

Not everything in *Jiang Hu* is entirely successful. One sequence involving a real life deus ex machina while very funny and possibly intended to be metaphorical seems to be imported from an entirely different movie. Also the pace of the movie does slow considerably in its final third before building again to a bloody climax, and while this makes thematic sense, a few judicious edits would have tightened it up. These are minor quibbles however and for the most part they do not prevent *Jiang Hu* from achieving that rarest of cinematic balances: the marriage of dynamic visual style with complex human drama. - KF

CDs

Emm Gryner - Asianblue ****1/2

Dead Daisy Records
www.emmgryner.com

If nothing else, Emm Gryner deserves accolades for simply being around. In a career arc reminiscent of fellow singer-songwriter Aimee Mann, the multi-talented Gryner was axed by a major label only to survive and even thrive as an independent through her own determination and hard work. Like Mann, Gryner produces intelligent, melodic pop tunes with hooks that will burrow into your brain. However, unlike Mann, who maintains a degree of arch detachment from her subject matter, Gryner has an earnestness that can be almost embarrassingly intimate. In fact, if Gryner has had an Achilles heel in the past, it has been a tendency to over-emote.

Thankfully, on her latest release Gryner has reined in her emotions and channelled them in service of her song-craft, making *Asianblue* her most mature work to date. The album kicks off with a powerhouse trio of songs that are easily the most catchy and radio-friendly that she has ever written. From the power pop of *Symphonic* and *Beautiful Things* to the Blue Rodeo-style country rock of *Northern Holiday* (a not-so-veiled reference to her recent decision to move back to Canada after several years of attempting to pursue her career Stateside), the tight arrangements and polished production values showcase the careful craftsmanship that places her several notches above most other indie artists.

If the rest of the album seems to be a slight letdown after that, it is only because the bar has been set so high. Certainly, there are many other gems here: the infectious *Young Rebel* and the melancholy *Siamese Star* to name but two. And in an era of overblown indulgence, it is nice to see all eleven songs clock in at an economical 39 minutes. There is not a wasted moment anywhere.

After all the ups and downs of her career, Emm Gryner deserves a break. If there is any justice in the world, this will be it. - KF

Wendy Ip - Fan Favourites So Far ***1/2

Independent
www.wendyip.com

Originally from Winnipeg, Manitoba and now based in New York, Wendy Ip is a singer-songwriter in the intelligent pop tradition of the Beatles and Elvis Costello. Her debut CD, *Fan*

Favourites So Far, is a collection of popular songs from recording sessions in New York, L.A. and Vancouver and is filled with catchy hooks, Beatles-esque melodies and sharp lyrics. The songs are fun and biting, often with bittersweet lyrics counterpointing the happy melodies: *Our Little Room* describes life in a cramped apartment, dreaming of better days ahead, *Most Of The Time*, the album closer, is a haunting song about an abusive partner. Ip's sweet voice and piano playing virtuosity is highlighted by the deft production skills of Joe Berardi and Joseph Briggs. After a couple of listens, these songs will be imbedded in your head. - FYL

Moulann - Introspective ****

Independent
www.moulann.com

Introspective is the full-length debut of Toronto's Moulann Chang, who recently topped the English-language ranking chart of Grooveasia.com. Skilfully co-produced by the artist along with Adam Messinger, the album showcases Moulann's talent for writing melodic, catchy hooks, matched with emotional lyrics. Her voice shines on the plaintive *Over Again* and *Where Did Forever Go?* accompanied only by piano. Although focusing mainly on ballads, the album does contain a variety of sounds. Album opener *Dancing on a Cloud* is an energetic drum & bass influenced cut, *Sweet Baby* explores an urban R&B feel, featuring Nasri from Toronto radio station Flow 93.5, while *Amitofo*, features Buddhist chanting over chilled electronic beats. My only qualm is that some of the songs are a bit on the short side leaving you longing for more. Moulann's next release will see her collaborating with different producers, and I look forward to hearing the results. – FYL

Rex Navarrete - Bastos ****

Kakarabow productions
www.rexnavarrete.com

The title means "Shameful" in Filipino, and it's a shameful pleasure that many of us take in revering the Asian-North American experience by making fun of it. San Francisco comedian Rex Navarrete takes this one step further in his stand up act by cruising into territory many of us would rather not touch … but will gladly laugh at. His third release gets down and dirty with routines like the difference between *National Geographic* and *Playboy*, or learning the birds and the bees from Tito Boy. There is some sexually explicit material that for me was a welcome departure from his previous family-oriented fare. A sure-fire laugh for any Pinoy out there, even though most of it would have parents screaming "BASTOS!" - CM

Tim Tamashiro - Love at Christmas ***1/2

Music Incubator
www.timtam.net

Calgary's Tim Tamashiro already has four albums under his belt. Just in time for the holiday season comes *Love at Christmas*, filled with up-tempo, feel-good tunes perfect for lounging by the fireplace or dancing in the kitchen while baking cookies. With a voice as smooth as creamy peanut butter and a style reminiscent of Tony Bennett and Frank Sinatra, the self proclaimed "Wise Ass Crooner" charms his way through 14 Christmas classics including a flat-out hilarious rendition of *You're A Mean One Mr. Grinch*. Enchanted by his catchy choices in tunes and care-free attitude towards jazz, we're all waiting for what he is going to wrangle in next. – CM

Will Wong - will i am ***1/2

Independent
www.will-wong.com

There have been only a handful of artists that have successfully combined Chinese lyrics with Western influence. You can add Toronto-based Will Wong to that list. His latest effort *Will I Am* is an eclectic mix of pop, R&B, gospel and disco house that switches between Mandarin, Cantonese and English with ease. His emotive four-plus octave range vocals cry and quiver similar to a very sexy Donny Osmond back in the day. Standouts on this 8-track album include his up-tempo R&B song *Suga (So Right)*, soulful ballad *No Longer Mine* and the Cantonese gospel *Start Again*. If you're worried that you won't understand his lyrics, you don't need to; the music speaks for itself. Impressive. Will Wong is definitely one to keep an eye on. - CM

Vienna Teng - Waking Hour ***

Virt Records
www.viennateng.com

The debut album of Vienna Teng, *Waking Hour* starts off strongly, but quickly blends into one long song past track 5. It's not that it's a bad album — Teng's talent as a musician, singer/songwriter is evident — but it's filled with somewhat generic, piano-driven pop. It's also low on what I might call "believability;" she somehow fails to make me believe what she is singing is true, which gives the album an air of pretention that is difficult to shake. Critics have compared her to Tori Amos and Sarah McLachlan and I can see that, though she is not at the same level. Perhaps, for her next release the spin doctors should order a dose of innovation and experimentation with different styles to take her obvious talent to greater heights. - CM

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